



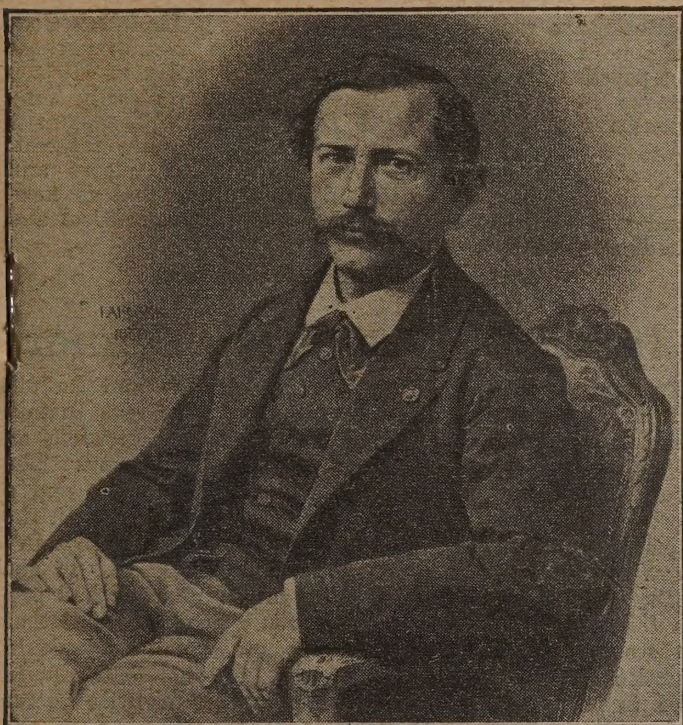
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The Berthelot Centenary

By Our Paris Correspondent

inauguration of the exhibition of souvenirs of Marcelin Berthelot at the Faculty of Pharmacy, Paris, took place on October 24. There was no official reception, no robes nor uniforms. The delegates were in informal chatting groups, and included professors and ex-professors of the Faculty (MM. Guignard, Moureu, Coutière, Lebeau), members of the Academy of Sciences (MM. d'Arsonval, Gabriel Bertrand, Desgrez, Matignon), Prof. Sabatier, the Nobel prizeman, and numerous distinguished foreigners. The Dean, M. Radais, made a brief speech welcoming the delegates. It was felt to be appropriate, he said, that the first of the centenary gatherings should take place at the institution to which Berthelot was attached when he first published his new theories. They had got together the few stray relics of



M Berthelot

his presence at the School of Pharmacy which time and change had spared, and he invited the delegates to visit this collection. This was located in the entrance lobby, decorated for the occasion with green plants. Right and left were marble busts of Pelletier, Caventou, Guibourt, Chatin, Moissan, and Milne-Edwards, and at the end of the hall the Pharmacists' War Memorial. In glass cases were shown various apparatus used by the great *savant*, the calorimeter and calorimetric bombs for his thermochemical researches, the "electric egg," or ampull in which he succeeded in synthesising acetylene, and the rudimentary apparatus with which he demonstrated the fixation of atmospheric nitrogen by plants. Other cases contained his writings. Here nearly fifty bound volumes represented his published works. The last MS. pages he penned were near his first chemical note-book, one of those cheap quarto account books, which he utilised much later in life, for the "Catalogue of the chemical laboratory of the School of Pharmacy in 1867." Nor was his practical work forgotten, samples of crystallised formic acid, various mannites and cholesterins, butyrim and stearins, camphors, etc., filled eight or ten stands. Although it was not officially announced, I understand that Prof. Délépine, who was chatting in a quiet corner of the exhibition, was its principal orga-

niser, for I had met him a few days before hunting up historical documents for this purpose at the Academy of Sciences. It took some time for the two hundred visitors to get round the crowded hall, as some of the exhibits aroused considerable interest, but after an hour or so the waiting vehicles speeded us to the College of France, the scene of Berthelot's scientific débuts.

A tiny platform had been erected between two statues in the forecourt, and surrounded with laurels and evergreens. Here M. Maurice Croiset, member of the Institute, made his speech of homage to the deceased *savant* and welcomed the delegates. Dr. W. Schlénk, head of the German deputation, professor at the university and director of the Institute of Chemistry at Berlin, followed, opening in his native language with clear and forcible delivery, and winding up in very fair French. The third and last speaker was Mr. Marstin T. Bogert, of Columbia University, U.S.A., a former president of the American Chemical Society. He spoke in English, and his remarks were briefly translated. The motive of the three discourses was a tribute to Berthelot and a hope that the march of intellect might lead us nearer to a world federation, where the special aptitudes of each nation would be utilised for universal benefit. The discourses terminated, we were invited to visit the venerable college where Berthelot worked as *préparateur* and rose to professor. I have heard a good deal of the "distress of the laboratories" in general, and of the College of France in particular, but never quite realised the real state of things before. The passages and staircases were so narrow that we passed in single file, gendarmes in uniform being posted to keep us on the right track as we threaded the maze. The students in the laboratories were all hard at work, each open door bore a notice explaining the nature of the researches carried on inside, so that delegates interested in any particular line of science could step in and chat with the white overalled workers. Finally we reached the most dilapidated place of all, with asphalt floor, plastered walls, and skylight covered with soot and dust, the "one part left as it was when Berthelot worked there," so a card announced. Next we entered the tiny dingy amphitheatre, where our endless Indian file was watched and greeted by a fine, white-headed, white-bearded veteran, Prof. Charles Moureu, who is decidedly the most handsome of our great chemists since the death of Henri Moissan. "Oh, yes," he was saying in reply to an inquirer, "it's just the same old amphitheatre as in Berthelot's day, nothing altered, a coat of paint, perhaps," he added somewhat doubtfully, as he glanced around. "Yes, not only Berthelot, but Thénard and J. B. Dumas lectured here." "And Balard?" I asked. "Of course, you know Berthelot was his *préparateur*." A "cuve à mercure" and eudiometer used by Berthelot were shown here. Then upstairs, stairs so worn that one step was actually missing, and a *gendarme* stood by to assist in case of accidents and to warn us the next one was not particularly safe, we went to other laboratories, and finally past Berthelot's study, a quiet, pleasant room looking out on to the forecourt, to which we again descended. Several groups were photographed, and the final incident was the placing of a wreath at the foot of Berthelot's statue, which stands under a tree on a grassy slope outside the college, by Professor Baker, of the delegation of the Chemical Society of London. It is a simple statue, an informal portrait of the man as one saw him in his laboratory, in a loose long coat with a knitted scarf round his neck. The unveiling of a memorial tablet fixed between the windows of the mezzanine floor of one of the tall narrow houses, Berthelot's old home, No. 113, of the ancient and crowded thoroughfare, rue St. Martin, was the last ceremony of the morning. The tablet, surrounded by palm leaves and flanked by the tricolor and the arms of the city, bore the inscription translated:—"Marcelin Berthelot, born at Paris, Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, October 23, 1827, lived in this house from 1852 to 1861." The tablet was unveiled in the presence of the president and vice-president of the Municipal Council, M. and Madame Langlois (Berthelot's son-in-law and daughter), M. and Mme. Philippe Berthelot and M. Andre Berthelot.

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